Castlemaine Naturalist

June 2014

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Tree Skink, *Egernia striolata*, Gunbower
Photo – Denis Hurley

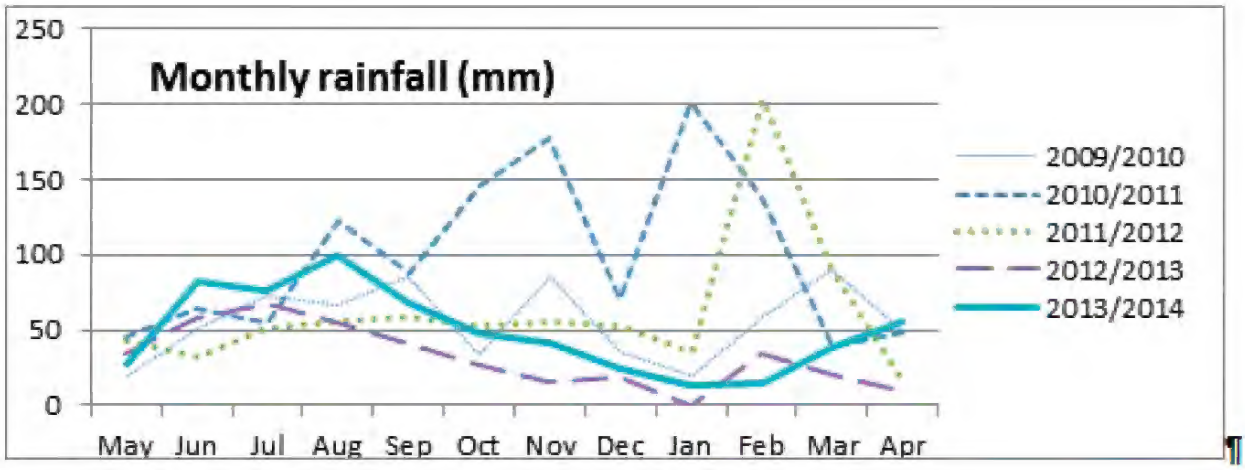
Dry summer?

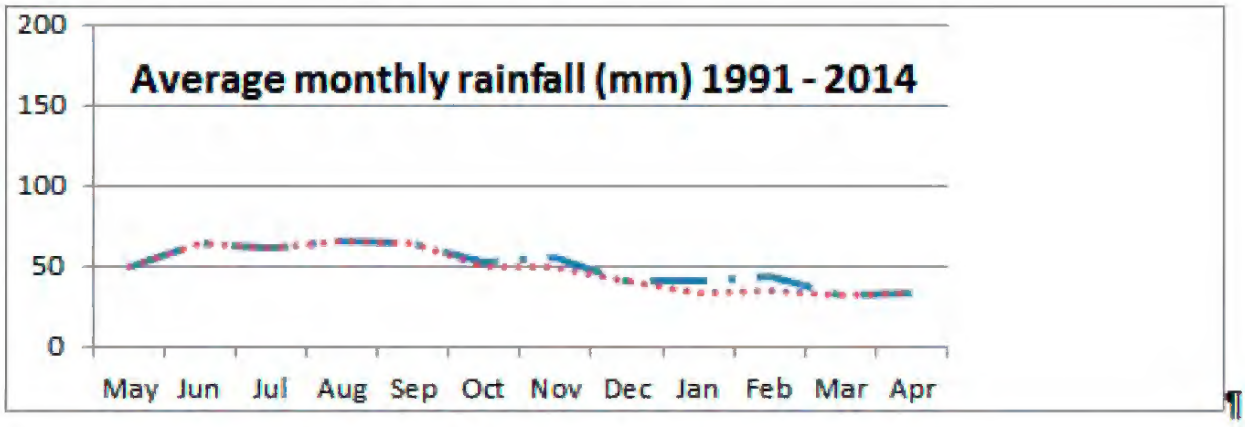
Barbara Guerin

We live at the south end of Castlemaine next to bush. This summer small numbers of kangaroos were often in our front garden and side paddock. In particular a mother and her joey would often wander down the driveway (as you do) then the mother would jump the wire mesh fence into the side paddock leaving the joey stranded in the garden. The joey would alternate between anxiously pacing the fence and affecting nonchalance – inspecting its nails, scratching behind its ears, looking at the sky etc. We took to opening two gates so the joey could make a dash across the back yard and into the paddock. Kangaroos may have very small brains but this joey quickly got the idea.

During the day the kangaroos kept their distance from the house but their droppings overnight told a different story. Even so it was a surprise to see the mother (we think) drinking from the birdbath just a few metres from a window. This was at about 7.30pm, early March. The camera had to cope with low light, double glazing and flywire.

All this led me to wonder if last summer was particularly dry so I looked at BOM's monthly rainfall statistics from the Castlemaine Prison - our closest Bureau weather station. The graphs go from May of one year to April of the next year because this makes sense to me when looking at what happened over summer. I looked at the last 5 years – the time we've been here and the time since the drought – and the long term average (1991 – 2014). In the first graph you can see the flood events in Nov 2010 and Jan 2011 and also in Feb 2012. The second graph shows that over the last 23 years the summer months have averaged around 30 to 40mm (especially if you subtract the influence of those exceptional rain events - see dotted line).





My conclusion is that this summer was a bit drier than average, but not by much. Garden - wise, I'm not going to replace plants that died over summer but concentrate on the species that survived well as it was after all, an "average" summer. As for the kangaroos, I suspect they're now a permanent feature at our place.

Avian Tyranny

Rita Mills

On several occasions recently I have had the novel experience of not only having Magpies carolling outside to tell me that they considered it time for me to put the scraps out for them, and even the Ravens joining the chorus at times (they only get them if there's any available anyway) but the resident Blue Wren family, consisting mainly of young males, at least one mature male in full livery, and a couple of Jennies, have been peering and scolding me from the Emu Bush next to the spot where I throw the scraps. They have been picking up left over crumbs for some time now, but to have these tiny birds watching me and chittering at me, popping in and out of the bush, or on another occasion, from the shelter of the Wonga Vine, was quite a novelty, and a rather endearing one. I must admit I felt just a little bit flattered that they trusted me that much until I remembered occasions when we have been eating lunch at a picnic table somewhere on the bush, with accompanying Superb Blue Wrens. They seem to be very confiding where an easy meal is in the offing. I never have had the same happen with any other species of wren, though – some being very shy and hard to even get a glimpse of.

Birds and animals seen at Gunbower island april 1 to april 6, 2014

Denis Hurley

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMENTS
Whistling Kite	Haliastur sphenurus	Very active most days, all day
Galah	Cacatua roseicapilla	
Brown Treecreeper	Climacteris picumnus	
Black-Faced Cuckoo-Shrike	Coracina novaehollandiae	
Red Wattlebird	Anthochaera carunculata	
Crested Shrike-Tit	Falcunculus frontatus	
Restless Flycatcher (Scissor Grinder)	Myiagra Inquieta	flew very close at our arrival, faced us and gestured angrily with wings in scissor grinder flutter as if to tell us to move away – but came back several times during our stay, and on the last day, flew very close as if to say goodbye!
White-Winged Chough	Corcorax melanorhamphos	
Pied Butcherbird	Cracticus nigrogularis	Beautiful, melodious call
White-Faced Heron	Egretta novaehollandiae	
Pacific Black Duck	Anas superciliosa	
Australian Wood Duck	Chenonetta jubata	
Laughing Kookaburra	Dacelo novaeguineae	
Eastern Rosella	Platycercus eximius	
Red-Rumped Parrot	Psephotus haematonotus	
Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo	Cacatua galerita	
Dusky Woodswallow	Artamus cyanopterus	
Welcome Swallow	Hirundo neoxena	
Peaceful Dove	Geopelia striata	
Grey Shrike-Thrush	Colluricincla harmonica	
Magpie-Lark (Peewee)	Grallina cyanoleuca	
Pied Cormorant		Species not confirmed – too distant
Black Cormorant		Species not confirmed – too distant
Raven		Species not confirmed – too distant
Australian Magpie	Gymnorhina race tibicon	(Black backed) – also saw White Backed further away
White-Plumed Honeyeater	Lichenostomus penicillatus	
Superb Fairy-Wren	Malurus cyaneus	
White-Throated Treecreeper	Cormobates leucophaeus	
Crimson (Yellow) Rosella	Platycercus elegans	
Pelican (Australian)	Pelecanus conspicillatus	
Willie Wagtail	Rhipidura leucophrys	
Pardalote		Species not confirmed
Azure Kingfisher	Alcedo azurea	
Nankeen Night Heron		Heard, not seen
Other outer leaf feeders		Species not confirmed
Tree Skink	Egernia striolata	see cover photo

A Wild Time in Brisbane

Noel Young

Following my tongue-in-cheek article on the avian terrorists of Brisbane restaurants, I had a further experience at the botanical gardens café. The deck area was semi-enclosed, which may have been the reason that White Ibis, parading around the lawn outside, showed no interest in the tables. However,

the same could not be said for two or three Pied Butcherbirds and Noisy Miners, which flew around the room with impunity. And of course, you had to watch where you were going or you could trip over a water dragon looking for crumbs or hand-outs. It was interesting to watch a Mexican stand-off between bird and dragon over a few crumbs on the floor, and a Pied Butcherbird balancing happily on a slippery chrome rail.

But lest I leave the impression that my bird-watching has degenerated into total decadence, I must say there were several excursions into bush areas around Brisbane, which included rainforest tracks in places like the D'Aguilar range, Maleny, Mt Tamborine, and Natural Bridge. Common birds around Brisbane include Noisy Miner, Magpie, Butcherbird (both Pied and Grey), Rainbow Lorikeet, Brush Turkey, Ibis, Currawong and so on, but in bush areas you are quite likely to come across Black Cockatoo, Green Cat-bird, Eastern Whip-bird, Satin Bowerbird, Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Bell-miner, White-throated Treecreeper, Fig-bird, Pale-headed Rosella, King Parrot, among others.

I scored one sighting of a **Logrunner** vigorously scratching in the leaf litter on the forest floor like a miniature Mallee-fowl, and by a stroke of luck added a new bird to my list - a **Brown Cuckoo-dove** . (*Macropygia amboinensis)* (left) which came down to drink in a small puddle then flew to a branch to pose for a photograph.

Top left: starting young - wildlife encounters in the park

Above: a haughty water dragon

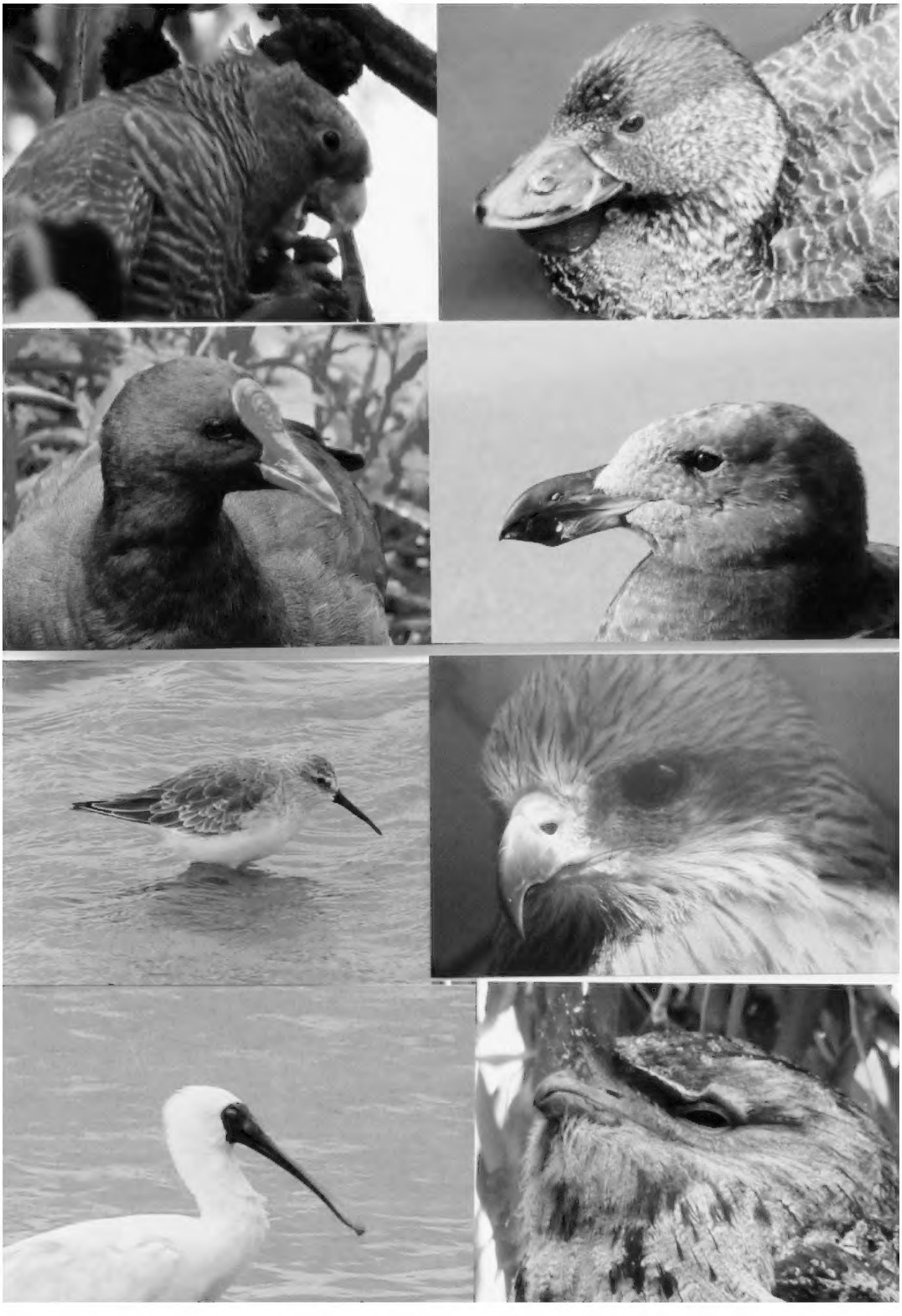
Top right: Lace Monitor, D'Aguilar range

Centre right: a large sleeping? Python, Mt. Tamborine

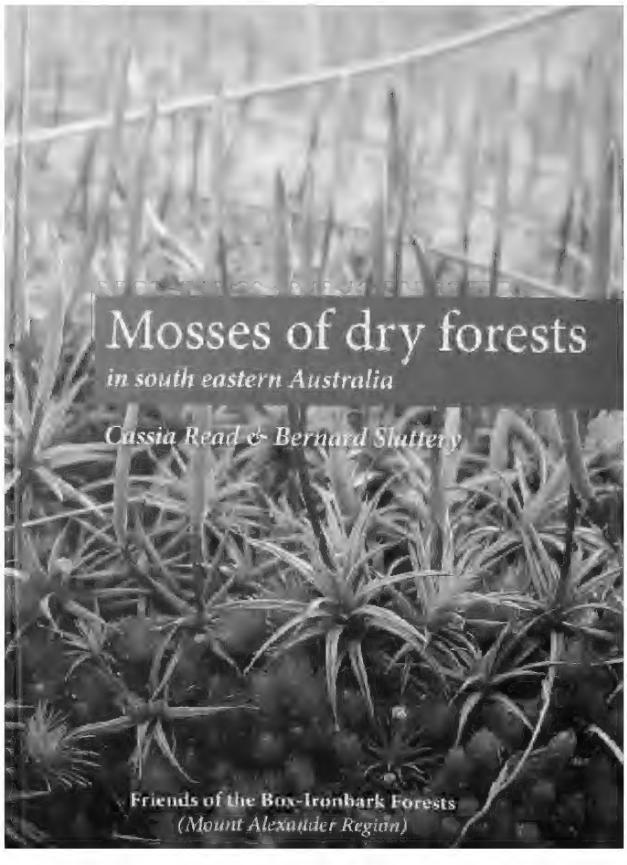
Right: The ubiquitous Noisy Miner

Purpose - built beaks

Joy Weatherill



May 31 launch of FOBIF's moss guide


Mosses of dry forests
in south eastern Australia
Cassia Read & Bernard Slattery
Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests
(Mount Alexander Region)

Frances Cincotta launches the Moss guide

Saturday morning saw a large roll-up in the theatre foyer for the launch of the long awaited guide to the mosses. This wonderful book has been a labour of love for a small group of local enthusiasts for about two years. Members may recall the well illustrated address given to the club in September 2012 by Cassia Read [Castlemaine Naturalist #403] who lives in Castlemaine and was completing a PhD on bryophytes. Together with Bernard Slattery of Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests and other keen photographers and "moss heroes", Cassia guided the collection of material at first for a brochure, which soon became a book with the generous support of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation. Much of the final editing and assembly was attributed to Beth Mellick.

The book outlines a number of the more easily recognised locally occurring species, and is packed with high quality photographs showing diagnostic aspects such as the spore capsules and leaves, with diagrams of the leaf shape and size for each. Macro-photography such as this requires patience, perseverance and good technique to achieve a good result, so the photographers deserve a special tribute.

After speeches by both Bernard and Cassia telling the story of its development, the book was officially launched by native plant expert Frances Cincotta, of Newstead Natives and Newstead Landcare.

- Noel Young

Artists Elissa Goodrich and Michael Carmody recently sent the following request to the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club.

We are Melbourne-based artists (a composer/musician and video artist respectively). We have recently commenced a residency with Punctum inc (based at the ICU space) in Castlemaine to develop an original sound and visual work that is inspired by the changing patterns of migratory birds (and the bird calls of very rare, endangered and recently extinct birds to the Mount Alexander area).

We have viewed the Castlemaine Field Naturalist Club's terrific pamphlets and the online site (and its archived newsletters) and are very interested in meeting with Club members who may be interested in sharing their knowledge of (in particular) How bird life has changed in their observations (increases or decreases in specific bird species). We are also interested in researching archival recordings of birds from the Mount Alexander shire and especially those of birds that may now be endangered or extinct to this area.*

Thanking you for your time.
Elissa and Michael
http://www.facebook.com/pages/States-of-Play/134287443423957

The CFNC committee agreed that it was appropriate to make all club members aware of this request. If you are potentially interested in participating, Elissa and Michael will be giving a short talk about their work before the main speaker at the June club meeting. There will also be an opportunity after the meeting to leave your contact details with Elissa and Michael.

Editor's Bit

First, I would like to thank Barbara Guerin for standing in as editor for the May issue of Castlemaine Naturalist while I was away. I'm sure you will agree it was an excellent effort.

You may or may not receive this issue before the excursion to Blackwood, on Saturday 7th, where we will join Ballarat FNC on a fungi forage. Les Hanrahan, following his talk to our club at the May meeting, will no doubt lead us to some fine examples following the recent rains.

At our next meeting, Geoff Park is not able to make it, so we have arranged for Bernard Slattery to give us a presentation on the new moss book he has co-authored with Cassia Read.

- NY

Observations

At the May meeting -

- Christine described an encounter with a foraging Echidna
- Natalie described how she observed a rabbit, then later a fox carrying same? rabbit encountering a noisy flock of Ravens which caused it to double back with its prize to safer ground
- Richard reported that at a Mt Alexander survey plot recently there were three or four orchids and about 200 Chocolate Lily stalks where none of these were found five years ago during the drought

Later -

- Rita has had 8 or 9 Eastern Rosellas together at the bird bath - unusual to see them in such numbers
- Chris Timewell saw a Boobook Owl in a Japanese Maple near the library
- Richard reported seeing Red-tipped Greenhoods, Parsons Bands, Midge Orchids and Tall Greenhoods coming up, while in the local area with Ern and Leslie
- Late May - occasional noisy mixed flocks noticed in my backyard usually consisting of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Superb Blue Wrens, and Silvereyes. There is also a constant presence of New Holland Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds owing to the May flowering of the Ironbarks in Murphy St., and on May 28, a flock of over 50 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew from Wesley Hill NE toward the pine plantation in the late afternoon - Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Sat June 7 field trip: Blackwood fungi - joint excursion with Ballarat FNC; leader Les Hanrahan. Meet at the Octopus 9.15 am to join BFNC at the Garden of St. Erth car park 10.30 am. Bring lunch. Should finish about 3 pm.

Fri June 13 meeting: speaker BERNARD SLATTERY - the new moss booklet

Fri July 11 meeting: speaker DAVID HOLLANDS - shore birds

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2014
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2014 Committee

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